

## **HOMILY FOR PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD**

IN THE DAYS OF JESUS, WAVING OF PALM BRANCHES WOULD BE EQUIVALENT TO BURNING THE AMERICAN FLAG IN OUR COUNTRY. IT WOULD BE CONSIDERED CAUSE FOR DIVISION AND POSSIBLE ATTACK ON THOSE DOING SUCH A HEINOUS ACT! THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WITNESSING THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF JESUS INTO JERUSALEM WORRIED THAT THE ROMAN, OCCUPYING THE LAND OF ISRAEL, WOULD SEE THIS AS SLAP IN THE FACE AGAINST THE ROMANS, AN ACT OF DEFIANCE, AND WOULD INVADE JERUSALEM TO DESTROY THE TEMPLE, KILL THEIR LEADERS AND POSSIBLY SEND THE PEOPLE AWAY CAPTIVE TO A FOREIGN LAND!! SO THEY SEE JESUS AS THE CAUSE OF THIS THREAT, AND SO FIGURED THAT, FOR THE GOOD OF THE PEOPLE, JESUS MUST BE STOPPED...AND THE ONLY WAY WAS DEATH, DEATH ON THE CROSS!!

IN OUR GOSPEL READING FROM THE PASSION ACCOUNT ACCORDING TO SAINT MATTHEW, WE HEAR JESUS CRY OUT FROM THE CROSS, *ELI, ELI, LEMA SABACTHANI!* WHICH MEANS *MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME!* JESUS IS QUOTING FROM PSALM 22. WE MAY THINK OF THIS CRY AS ONE OF DESPAIR. THIS PSALM WAS PART OF TODAY'S RESPONSORIAL PSALM, BUT IF WE WERE TO TAKE THE ENTIRE PSALM, WE MIGHT GAIN A WHOLE NEW INSIGHT INTO THIS PRAYER OF JESUS FROM THE CROSS!

IT DOES START OUT ON A NOTE OF DESPAIR: (2) *MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME? WHY SO FAR FROM MY CALL FOR HELP, FROM MY CRIES OF ANGUISH?* (3) *MY GOD, I CALL BY DAY, BUT YOU DO NOT ANSWER; BY NIGHT, BUT I HAVE NO RELIEF!*

HAS THIS PRAYER EVER BEEN YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE? HAVE YOU EVER FELT ABANDONED BY GOD? HAVE YOU EVER CRIED OUT TO GOD, DAY AND NIGHT, WITH ANGUISH IN YOUR HEART, AND NEVER HAD RELIEF? JESUS EXPERIENCED THESE SAME EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS IN HIS HEART, NOT ONLY ON THE CROSS, BUT IN THE TEMPTATIONS IN THE DESERT, AND SO MANY, MANY TIMES IN HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY WHEN THERE WERE TIMES OF BETRAYAL AND PERSECUTION AND ALL THOSE MOMENTS OF DOUBT THAT THE

DEVIL, THE 'FATHER OF LIES' WAS THERE TO PLANT IN THE MIND, HEART AND SOUL OF JESUS...WHO IN THE WORDS OF ST. PAUL, WAS *ONE LIKE US IN ALL THINGS BUT SIN*. SO HE EXPERIENCED JUST WHAT YOU AND I DO WHEN IT COMES TO OUR PRAYERS SEEMING TO BE IGNORED BY GOD AT THOSE TIMES WE NEED HIS CONSOLATION THE MOST.

YET, THIS PSALM DOES NOT END IN DESPAIR. LET US FOLLOW IT THROUGH. (4) *YET YOU ARE ENTHRONED AS THE HOLY ONE; YOU ARE THE GLORY OF ISRAEL. (5) IN YOU OUR FATHERS TRUSTED; THEY TRUSTED AND YOU RESCUED THEM. (6) TO YOU THEY CRIED AND THEY ESCAPED; IN YOU THEY TRUSTED AND THEY WERE NOT DISAPPOINTED.*

BUT THEN HERE THE PSALM GIVES US A REFLECTION THAT MIRRORS THE PASSION OF JESUS. (7) *BUT I AM A WORM, NOT A MAN, SCORNFUL BY MEN, DESPISED BY THE PEOPLE. (8) ALL WHO SEE ME MOCK ME, THEY CURL THEIR LIPS AND JEER; THEY SHAKE THEIR HEADS AT ME. (9) "HE RELIED ON THE LORD – LET HIM DELIVER HIM; IF HE LOVES HIM, LET HIM RESCUE HIM"!*

DOESN'T THIS FIT SO EXACTLY THE SUFFERING OF JESUS ON THE CROSS, WHEN ALL THOSE PEOPLE FILLED WITH HATE FOR HIM HURLED ABUSIVE WORDS AND SHOOK THEIR FISTS AT HIM FOR FAILING TO BE THE MESSIAH WHO WOULD BRING AN ARMY TO CONQUER THE ROMANS AND DRIVE THEM AWAY!! JESUS WAS TO THEM A FALSE PROPHET WHO DESERVED TO DIE THIS HORRIBLE DEATH! IN THEIR MINDS EVEN GOD WAS SHAKING HIS FIST IN THE FACE OF JESUS! IN THEIR MINDS THEY FELT TOTALLY JUSTIFIED AT KILLING THIS INNOCENT MAN WHO PRAYED, *FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO!*

HAS THIS BROUGHT TEARS TO YOUR EYES YET? IF NOT, YOU NEED TO ENTER MORE DEEPLY INTO OUR LORD'S PASSION AND THIS HORRIFIC SCENE. MAYBE PSALM 22 CAN HELP. (10) *FOR YOU DREW ME FORTH FROM THE WOMB, MADE ME SAFE AT MY MOTHER'S BREASTS. 11) UPON YOU I WAS THRUST FROM THE WOMB; SINCE MY MOTHER BORE ME YOU ARE MY GOD (12) DO NOT STRAY FAR FROM ME,*

*FOR TROUBLE IS NEAR, AND THERE IS NO ONE TO HELP.*

NO ONE TO HELP! HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN THAT PLACE AND FELT THAT LONELINESS? IT'S SCARY!! BUT WE DON'T HAVE TO BE THERE, FOR GOD IS FAITHFUL, AND EVER CLOSE TO US, AND JESUS SHOWS US. LET US CONTINUE IN THE PSALM.

*(13) MANY BULLS SURROUND ME; FIERCE BULLS OF BASHAN ENCIRCLE ME. 14) THEY OPEN THEIR MOUTHS AGAINST ME, LIONS THAT REND AND ROAR. 15) LIKE WATER MY LIFE DRAINS AWAY; ALL MY BONES ARE DISJOINTED. MY HEART HAS BECOME LIKE WAX, IT MELTS AWAY WITHIN ME. (16) AS DRY AS A POTSHERD IS MY THROAT; MY TONGUE CLEAVES TO MY PALATE; YOU LAY ME IN THE DUST OF DEATH. (17) DOGS SURROUND ME; A PACK OF EVILDOERS CLOSES IN ON ME. THEY HAVE PIERCED MY HANDS AND MY FEET (18) I CAN COUNT ALL MY BONES. THEY STARE AT ME AND GLOAT; (19) THEY DIVIDE MY GARMENTS AMONG THEM; FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS.*

THESE VERSES BRING US RIGHT TO THE CROSS AND TO THE READING OF THE PASSION. IT IS NEAR THE END, BUT NOT DESPAIR. HOPE IS ON THE HORIZON!

*(20) BUT YOU, LORD, DO NOT STAY FAR OFF; MY STRENGTH, COME QUICKLY TO HELP ME. (21) DELIVER MY SOUL FROM THE SWORD, MY LIFE FROM THE GRIP OF THE DOG. (22) SAVE ME FROM THE LION'S MOUTH, MY POOR LIFE FROM THE HORNS OF WILD BULLS. (23) THEN I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN; IN THE ASSEMBLY I WILL PRAISE YOU! (24) YOU WHO FEAR THE LORD, GIVE PRAISE! ALL DESCENDANTS OF JACOB, GIVE HONOR; SHOW REVERENCE, ALL DESCENDANTS OF ISRAEL!*

*(25) FOR HE HAS NOT SPURNED OR DISDAINED THE MISERY OF THIS POOR WRETCH. DID NOT TURN AWAY FROM ME, BUT HEARD ME WHEN I CRIED OUT! (26) I WILL OFFER PRAISE IN THE GREAT ASSEMBLY, MY VOWS I WILL FULFILL BEFORE THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. (27) THE POOR WILL EAT THEIR FILL; THOSE WHO SEEK THE LORD WILL OFFER PRAISE. MAY YOUR HEARTS ENJOY LIFE FOREVER!*

THE PSALM CONTINUES THROUGH VERSE 32, BUT VERSE 27 IS A GOOD PLACE TO END FOR NOW: *MAY YOUR HEARTS ENJOY LIFE FOREVER!*

INDEED, BECAUSE OF JESUS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD, OUR LIVES CAN BE FILLED WITH HOPE, IN SPITE OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH WE MAY LIVE IN. RECALL THE WORDS OF PSALM 23: *THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I FEAR NO EVIL, FOR YOU ARE AT MY SIDE, WITH YOUR ROD AND YOUR STAFF THAT GIVE ME COURAGE!*

THESE DAYS OF THE CORONA VIRUS, DAYS OF SEX ABUSE SCANDAL IN THE CHURCH, OUR LENTEN JOURNEY OF DEALING WITH OUR OWN NEED OF CONVERSION AND FACING OUR SINS, ALL THESE CAN OVERWHELM US. BUT WE MUST NOT LET THE ‘FATHER OF LIES’ PLANT SEEDS OF DOUBT IN OUR HEARTS, SOULS AND MINDS. WE ARE THE BELOVED SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND THIS IS A GIFT WON FOR US THROUGH THE LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

SO AS WE SHOUT OUR *HOSANNAS!* TO JESUS, LET US KNOW HE DOES COME TO SAVE US FROM THE POWER OF THE EVIL ONE, SO THAT WE LIVE IN HIS FREEDOM, HOPE AND JOY IN THIS WORLD...AND IN HIS KINGDOM, WHERE IN THE WORDS OF VERSE 27 OF PSALM 22, *MAY YOUR HEARTS ENJOY LIFE FOREVER!*

**LET US TAKE HIS HANDS, REACHING OUT TO US, AND SAY,**

***JESUS, I PLACE MY TRUST IN YOU. HELP ME TRUST YOU, AND LOVE YOU, MORE AND MORE!™.***

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